

Personal Branding – It’s Not What You Think

When you hear the words *personal branding*, do you think, “That’s for people who are into how they dress,” or “That’s for people who are into self-promotion?”

Unfortunately, those are just two of the myths that people often believe about personal branding. As a result of these myths, the concept of personal branding has gotten a bit of a bad rap that it simply doesn’t deserve. Let’s put these Personal Brand Myths to rest once and for all and uncover what “YOU™” - yes, The Trademarked You – is really all about.

Myth #1: “Personal Branding is all about self-promotion.”

This couldn’t be further from the truth! Smart personal branding isn’t about marketing yourself in an obvious or intrusive way. You can consciously but subtly communicate your personal brand through the five key activities you do every day: your Actions, Reactions, Look, Sound, and Thoughts.

Through these activities, you can model and live your brand 24/7 without the need to blow your own horn. As a result, those around you will simply become more and more aware of the contribution you can make in the workplace, for example. Your boss, colleagues, and customers will begin to notice “YOU™” more, and they will begin to count on you to deliver in the areas that you have defined for your personal brand.

Myth #2: “Personal Branding is all about how you look and dress.”

Let’s say you buy a car just because of how it looks. You then discover that, while it’s beautiful on the outside, it gets lousy gas mileage and sends you repeatedly to the mechanic. That would certainly change how you feel about your beautiful new car, wouldn’t it?

The same is true of personal branding. A great “Look” might fool someone briefly but will only get you so far. If the individual underneath that Look can’t deliver, it isn’t going to fool anyone for long. True personal branding has much more depth than that.

Your Look *is* one element of your personal brand. After all, if you’re trying to convey a personal brand of “impeccable accuracy,” and you dress in a sloppy way, that Look clearly won’t represent your personal brand well. On the other hand, if you dress impeccably but don’t *perform* impeccably, that won’t work either.

So, your personal brand extends far beyond just your Look. It includes how you perform, who you are, what you can offer, and what makes you distinctive in the work place. In short, your personal brand is all about your uniqueness, your strengths, your talents, and what you want to be known for on the job. It’s about so much more than a great power suit or a designer tie!

Myth #3: “Personal branding is all about me.”

Some people believe that personal branding is self-centered and all about “me, me, me,” but the truth is: Good, strategic personal branding starts first and foremost with your Audience. Who is your Audience?

It's the person or people you most want to influence in your career, and your brand exists in their *minds* in the way they *perceive, think, and feel* about YOU™.

Let's illustrate this by thinking about corporate brands for a moment. In branding, perception is everything. You can have a great product, but if the public's (Audience's) perception of the brand is negative, there's no avoiding it: Your product will ultimately not be successful.

The same is true of personal branding. You should first determine your Audience's *Needs* and make sure you fill those Needs... just like a top-selling shampoo might fill a consumer's need for shiny, healthy hair. If you can fill your Audience's Needs, YOU™ will be the person called on again and again to get the job done ... and promotions, accolades, and raises are sure to follow.

Myth #4: “Creating a personal brand is being fake.”

Once again, personal branding is often misjudged as something superficial. Yes, personal branding is about your Audience and how they perceive, think, and feel about YOU™. But that doesn't mean you focus on pleasing your Audience to the detriment of yourself. If your personal brand is a façade, you're going to be a very unhappy person.

Here's the truth: *You must be authentic to be true to your personal brand.* Yes, you must offer something of value to your Audience that fills their Needs. That's primary. But what you offer is based on who you are as an *individual*, not some character that you have created because you believe it's what your Audience wants. If the only way you can be happy in your job is to project a fake personal brand that has nothing to do with your personality, you definitely need to rethink your job and/or your career.

Myth #5: “I don't need – or even want – a Personal Brand.”

Are you someone who thinks you don't need or even want a personal brand? If so, consider this: If your personal brand is the way your Audience perceives, thinks, and feels about you, then that perception of you *is already out there*. Indeed, you already have a personal brand - it exists in the mind of your Audience.

So, everyone – including you – already has a personal brand. Simply by being yourself in the work place, you have created a brand without realizing it. Does this realization excite you.... or make you a bit nervous?

If you're not completely in charge of your personal brand, it is probably already out there, running amuck, creating an image that isn't exactly what you would like it to be. In fact, your current personal brand may be preventing you from reaching your full career potential. Only when you learn how to carefully define and communicate your *desired* personal brand can you take control of it and make it work for you. Only

Page 3 – Personal Branding – It's Not What You Think

then can you make sure that the way your Audience perceives, thinks, and feels about YOU™ is the way you want it to be - advantageous to yourself.

By focusing on true, strategic personal branding, you will have a roadmap to achieving your career goals. You can put more of your talents and strengths into your work and experience new excitement about what you do for a living. Personal branding can be one of the best investments you make in your future and in your career.

Brenda S. Bence is an internationally-recognized branding expert, Certified Executive Coach, Certified Speaking Professional, and the author of several award-winning books, including the *How YOU™ Are Like Shampoo* personal branding series and *Smarter Branding Without Breaking the Bank*.



In one of her recently released books, *Would YOU Want to Work for YOU™? How to build an executive leadership brand that inspires loyalty and drives employee performance*, Brenda brings her many years of transformational coaching successes, insights, examples, and real-world stories to the rewarding task of helping leaders reach their full potential.

After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent the bulk of her career as an executive in Fortune 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, Brand Development Associates International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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